# NEWS RELEASE

**U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE**
**Mountain-Prairie Region**
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## Endangered Species Act Protection for the American Pika Is Not Warranted

Although the American pika is potentially vulnerable to the impacts of climate change in portions of its range, the best available scientific information indicates that pikas will be able to survive despite higher temperatures. Pikas will have enough suitable high elevation habitat to prevent them from becoming threatened or endangered. As a result, the pika does not meet the criteria for protection under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced today after completing a thorough review of the species' status and evaluating current and future threats to the species.

"We have completed an exhaustive review of the scientific information currently available regarding the status of the American pika and have analyzed the potential threats to the species," said Steve Guertin, the Service's Director of the Mountain-Prairie Region. "Based on this information, we have determined that the species as a whole will be able to survive despite increased temperatures in a majority of its range and is not in danger of extinction in the foreseeable future."

The American pika is a small mountain-dwelling mammal that inhabits loose rock areas in alpine and subalpine mountain areas extending south from central British Columbia and Alberta into the Rocky Mountains of New Mexico and the Sierra Nevada Mountains of California. The historical range of the species includes California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and New Mexico.

A key characteristic of the American pika is its temperature sensitivity. Pikas cannot tolerate much higher body temperatures than their norm of 104 degrees Fahrenheit. Therefore, the species is found at progressively higher elevations, where cooler temperatures are found, as one moves south through the range of the species. In Canada, populations occur from sea level to 9,842 feet, but in New Mexico, Nevada, and southern California, populations rarely exist below 8,202 feet.

Based on the most recent information, the five subspecies of American pika are classified as: the Northern Rockies *(Ochotona princeps princeps)*; the Southern Rockies (*O.p. saxatilis)*; the Coastal Mountains and Cascade Range *(O.p. fenisex)*; the Sierra Nevada

and Great Basin *(O.p. schisticeps)*; and the Uinta Mountains and Wasatch Range of Central Utah *(O.p. uinta)*.

The Service analyzed potential factors that may affect the habitat or range of the American pika including climate change, livestock grazing, invasive plant species and fire suppression. Climate change was identified as the only potential threat to the species.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concludes that human-caused global climate change is occurring and has published research that represents the best available science on the subject. Because most of the IPCC climate change models apply to large, general scales, the Service worked with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to model historic and future temperatures at a more local scale within the range of the American pika. The models indicate summer temperatures were likely to increase an average of 5.4 degrees Farenheit in pika habitat.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration generated projections for surface temperatures for 20-year periods and centered on the years 2025, 2050, and 2100. However, the agency stated that because increases in greenhouse gas emissions can be interpreted with greater confidence until approximately mid-century, model projections for the next 30 to 50 years centered on 2050 have greater credibility than results projected further into the future. Therefore, for the purpose of this analysis, the Service centered its foreseeable future projections on the year 2050.

Several climate change variables can affect pika populations, including extremely hot or cold days, average summer temperatures, and duration of snow cover. In general, pika biologists agree that temperatures below the habitat surface, such as in loose rock area crevices, better approximate the conditions experienced by pikas because they rely on subsurface habitat to escape hotter summer daytime temperatures and obtain insulation during the colder winter months. Therefore, surface temperatures may not be as useful as subsurface temperatures for predicting the effects of climate change on pika populations.

Current information indicates that the Northern Rockies, Southern Rockies, Coastal Mountain/Cascade, and Uinta Mountains populations will not be adversely affected by climate change because the majority of pika populations occur at high elevations with correspondingly lower mean temperatures. We have determined that pikas will be able to survive the predicted temperature increases that will occur at these high elevations. Our analysis indicates that predicted temperature increases will not exceed the tolerance of the species or harm its habitat throughout the majority of its range.

The Great Basin population could be affected by climate change along with some lower elevation American pika populations outside of the Great Basin. These populations could be affected because they represent lower elevation sites that will have correspondingly higher mean temperatures by mid-century. Therefore, we expect to continue to see pikas disappear from some low-elevation habitats. However, these losses will not be on the scale that would cause any species, subspecies or distinct population segments of pika to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

Despite the trends of increasing American pika declines in the Great Basin due to increasing temperatures, there is ample evidence that the species can survive and thrive in some habitats with relatively hot surface temperatures. American pika populations thrive at a lower elevation site in the mountains near Bodie, California and in the hot climates of Craters of the Moon (Idaho) and Lava Beds National Monuments (California). Pika persist at these sites because they reduce activity during hot mid-day temperatures by retreating to significantly cooler conditions under the loose rock areas and perform daily activities during the cooler morning and evening periods. Despite altering their behavior in response to high temperatures, pikas can maintain high birth and low mortality rates.

Based on the current information available, the Service finds that the magnitude and imminence of threats do not indicate the American pika is in danger of extinction or likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

The public is encouraged to submit any new information that becomes available concerning the potential threats to the American pika or its habitat. Please submit your comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Utah Ecological Field Office, 2369 W. Orton Circle, Suite 50, West Valley City, Utah 84119.

In October 2007, the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) petitioned the Service to list the American pika and conduct a status review of each of the recognized subspecies of American pika. The Service advised CBD that the petition could not be addressed at that time because existing court orders and settlement agreements for other listing actions required nearly all of the listing funding. Subsequently, the CBD filed a notice of intent to sue over the Service's failure to publish a petition finding. The Service then entered into a settlement agreement requiring the Service to submit a petition finding to the Federal Register by May 1, 2009, and to submit a status review finding to the Federal Register by February 1, 2010.

For more information regarding the American pika, please visit our web site at http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/mammals/americanpika

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